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Company post-crisis communication strategies and the psychological mechanism underlying consumer reactions

Abstract

A theoretical framework is developed to explain the mechanisms that underlie the effectiveness of matching post-crisis communication strategies to the crisis types on relevant consumer reactions. Two studies are conducted regarding an actual crisis case – the Costa Concordia shipwreck on 2012. Study 1 provides evidence of more favorable consumer reactions to a company when confession strategy and preventable crisis are matched. The results verify that consumers' emotions of anger and sympathy play a mediating role. Study 2 demonstrates corporate reputation's moderating role on the link between post-crisis communication strategy and sympathy and through it on consumers' attitudinal and behavioral responses.

Keywords: post-crisis communication strategy, anger, sympathy, company reputation, consumer reaction

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Introduction

We define a crisis as "a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat" (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). In a time of crisis, consumers' negative reactions pose the biggest threat to a company. Crises can harm consumers physically, emotionally, and financially; furthermore, they may react by spreading negative word of mouth, or decide not to purchase from the company involved in the crisis or, more generally, develop negative evaluations of that company (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). All these reactions can lead to the company experiencing lower sales and lower market shares, and facing a serious financial risk (Coombs, 2007). Similarly, a crisis may damage a company's reputation by giving people reasons to think badly of it and thus adding negative information regarding how and the extent to which the company is not meeting consumer expectations.

Companies need to understand and use the correct post-crisis communication strategies in order to repair the damage to their reputations, to reduce consumer's negative emotional reactions, and to prevent negative behavioral intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; McDonald, Sparks, & Glendon, 2010). We followed Coombs's advice (2007) on the need to empirically investigate the effectiveness of different post-crisis communication strategies in order to give managers evidence-based guidance for decision-making in times of crisis.

This research focuses on the analysis of consumer reactions to crises and on how different post-crisis communication strategies can affect these reactions, measured as consumer attitudes to a company, the intention to buy its products, and negative word of mouth communication. We devote specific attention to the process that leads to consumers' behavioral reactions in a time of crisis. In particular, we focus on the role that consumers' emotional reactions – triggered by the crisis event and affected by the relevant post-crisis communication strategy and the prior company reputation – play. Consumer felt emotions are important elements in explaining why consumers react to company crises (Coombs, 2007). However, despite their central role, they have to date hardly been studied.

Specifically, our research makes three contributions. First, it shows the mediating role of two specific emotions (anger and sympathy) and the moderating role that corporate reputation has on the effects of specific post-crisis communication strategies on consumer reactions. The holistic approach adopted in this research is an important development in this field. We do not merely analyze the role of emotions with a piecemeal approach typical of other studies (e.g., McDonald et al., 2010), but adopt an integrated and consistent approach. We examine the mediating role of emotions and the moderating role of corporate reputation fully, and provide a complete overview of the mechanisms involved. Second, by going beyond previous views (e.g., Jin, 2009), which focus on the influence that consumers' attribution of responsibility has on emotions, we also specifically extend research on the influence that diverse post-crisis communication strategies has on emotions, even under the same condition of consumers' attribution of responsibility. In this study, we empirically analyze these different influences by undertaking an in-depth examination of the efficacy of matching the crisis response strategies to the crisis types. To our knowledge, no previous study has explored this aspect. Finally, our study adds to the existing crisis research by undertaking two controlled experiments with adult consumers administrated in the field, thus achieving a reasonable degree of external validity.

Systematization of Crisis Types and Post-crisis Communication Strategies

Extending the Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1995) and its assumptions about people's attribution of responsibility and related behaviors, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007) provides a useful framework to analyze the characteristics of the various crisis types and the response strategies that companies can implement to protect themselves from the threats posed by a crisis.

SCCT identifies three clusters of crisis types (Coombs, 2007, 2012): the victim cluster that produces very little or no attributions of responsibility to the company, (e.g., natural disasters), the accidental cluster that produces low attributions of responsibility to the company (e.g., technical-error product harm), and the preventable cluster that is characterized by very strong attributions of responsibility for the crisis to the company, (e.g., company misdeeds). This theory also provided guidelines to match different crisis types to post-crisis communication strategies with the aim of reducing harm to the company due to the crisis. Specifically, SCCT classifies post-crisis

communication strategies into the following groups (Coombs, 2007, 2012): 1) The denial group, which includes all post-crisis communication strategies aimed at eliminating any connection between the company and the crisis. Within this group are strategies such as those attacking the accuser, those aimed at identifying a scapegoat, and those that deny the crisis. 2) The diminish group, which includes all post-crisis communication strategies based on the idea that the crisis is not as bad as people think or that the company had no control over the crisis. This group includes strategies such as those trying to minimize the company's responsibility for the crisis, and those strategies that try to minimize the perceived damage. 3) The rebuild group, which includes all post-crisis communication strategies that offer the victims material and/or symbolic forms of aid, taking full responsibility for the crisis.

SCCT suggests that the effectiveness of each type of post-crisis communication strategy depends on the type of crisis that the company faces and provides a general connective frame: denial post-crisis communication strategies are matched to the "victim cluster" type of crisis; diminish post-crisis communication strategies are matched to the "accidental cluster" type of crisis, and rebuild post-crisis communication strategies are matched to the "preventable cluster" type of crisis. These links generally indicate that the greater the coherence between the crisis type and the post-crisis communication strategy, the better the returns the company will experience.

Experimental research on the efficacy of these SCCT guidelines is, however, mixed. Some studies show that a matched crisis response strategy leads to a better post-crisis situation than a mismatched crisis response strategy (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996), while others provide different evidence (e.g., Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010). Recently, Claeys & Cauberghe (2012) have tried to add value to this line of research by identifying factors that may moderate the efficacy of matching crisis response strategies to the crisis types. Specifically, their results show that with regard to a crisis which affects individuals personally (high crisis involvement), or to a rational framing of post-crisis communication (information provided objectively), those crisis response strategies that match the crisis type improve the post-crisis attitude to the organization. Vice versa, for a crisis that has no personal impact (low crisis involvement), or in presence of an emotional framing of the post-crisis communication (information provided subjectively in an evaluative way), the impact of a matched or mismatched crisis response strategy does not differ.

Within this general framework, we are interested in understanding the mechanisms behind the efficacy of matching post-crisis response strategies to the crisis types on key consumer reactions. As this research area develops and matures, the focus inevitably has to shift from demonstrating the existence of specific effects associated with such a match toward understanding, firstly, the mechanisms leading to these effects – how they come to be –, as well as, later, establishing their boundary conditions – the circumstances under which the effects exist. Answering such "*how*" (Study 1) and "*when*" (Study 2) questions results in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and also provides insights into how that understanding can be applied. Specifically, we pursue these research goals using theoretical arguments from previous research on responsibility reduction strategies (Weiner, 1995, 2010; McDonald et al., 2010). These arguments are central for providing a rationale for the underlying mediational role that anger and sympathy play. In addition, introducing the idea of company reputation by following Coombs (2007), we have also started to look into the contingencies governing the functioning of anger and sympathy in this specific research area.

We firstly introduce the emotional consequences of responsibility judgments and discuss the effects of different post-crisis communication strategies on these emotional consequences. Thereafter, we consider the role played by corporate reputation within this scheme.

Emotional Reactions to Responsibility Judgments and the Effects of Post-crisis Communication Strategies

Anger and sympathy are the two main emotions that are closely linked to perceptions of responsibility (Weiner, 1995). Inferences of controllability, intentionality, and responsibility in situations of transgression evoke anger. Anger is actually an emotion that grows from the belief that another could and should have done otherwise (Averill, 1982; Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 1991; Weiner, 1995). In contrast, sympathy emerges in the absence of responsibility judgments, or generally follows when another is hurt or suffering, and is experiencing a current need; that is, there is a discrepancy between an agent's current state and what one desires for that agent on one or more dimensions of well-being (Lishner, Batson, & Huss, 2011; Niezink, Siero, Dijkstra, Buunk, & Barelds, 2012; Weiner, 1995).

In addition to being elicited by notions of responsibility or otherwise, anger and sympathy stimulate subsequent actions. Anger often guides victims to divert from the cause of their anger and to retaliate with actions that can produce harm; on the other hand, sympathy guides individuals in the opposite direction, increasing their more positive, pro-social acts.

The processes of consumer attribution of responsibility can trigger emotions that influence consumer reactions to a crisis. Increased attribution of crisis responsibility, which is typical of the preventable crisis considered in this research, generates stronger negative feelings, such as anger, toward the company (Choi & Linn, 2009; Coombs, 2007; Jin, 2009; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2012) and can decrease feelings of sympathy for it (Coombs, 2007). In turn, these emotions affect consumers' intention to act. Angry consumers can show that they are motivated to act against the company responsible for the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006) by, for example, decreasing their intention to buy company's products, increasing their negative word of mouth, or diminishing their attitude to the company.

Companies do, however, have the opportunity to use post-crisis communication strategies to lessen the harm to themselves due to a preventable crisis. Better results are – under specific conditions (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012) – associated with a closer match between the crisis type and the post-crisis communication strategy. This research aims to explain the efficacy of this match; extending McDonald et al. (2010), we show the positive emotional repercussions – in terms of decreasing anger and enhancing sympathy – associated with the use of a confession strategy, instead of using an excuse or a denial strategy when addressing a typical preventable crisis characterized by a high level of responsibility and the consequent anger.

Denial, excuse, and confession are among the most common post-crisis communication strategies that companies' spokespersons use (Fitzpatrick & Rubon ,1995; Garrett, Bradford, Mayers, &

Becker,1989; McDonald et al., 2010) and they actually map the SCCT's classification of clusters of post-crisis communication strategies (Coombs, 2007, 2012)[1].

With regard to a preventable crisis, which is the type of crisis this work considers, a company can deny the event or the meaning of the event for which it is being held accountable. This post-crisis communication strategy is, in this specific case, a type of lie that can often increase conflicts and negative evaluations (Weiner, 1995). Conversely, a company might admit that an adverse outcome took place, but maintain that its cause could not be controlled. This excuse post-crisis communication strategy is used with the attribution of the responsibility shifting to external or internal factors not controllable by the company. As stated by Schlenker, Pontani, and Christopher (2001), the idea behind this strategy is to convince audiences that the negative event is not as much the agent's fault as might otherwise appear; thus, minimizing the negative repercussions of the event. Although excuses may occasionally have qualities that decrease negative feelings by reducing responsibility – especially if the excuses are good as Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, and Verette, (1987) report –, they simultaneously often increase negative evaluations because the victims (those harmed) regard the transgressors as neither accepting responsibility, nor engaging in appropriate actions that promote forgiveness (Weiner, 2010). Finally, in a confession post-crisis communication strategy, the company admits committing a negative act, accepts full responsibility, includes an apology, and asks for forgiveness. There is a fair amount of experimental and observational research, (e.g., Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991; Gold & Weiner, 2000) showing that confessions are effective in reducing negative perceptions, undesirable emotional reactions, and retaliatory behaviors, while they increase sympathy, forgiveness, and restore interpersonal relationships to their prior level of trust[2].

[1] Our study also incorporates a condition under which a company does not react to the crisis. In our analysis, this no-comment strategy is used as a reference point to identify the impact that different company responses have on a crisis versus a situation in which a company does not react at all.

[2] From an attribution perspective, confession should have adverse consequences; as reported by Weiner (2010, p. 118) "the transgressor accepts full responsibility, which theoretically increases anger and subsequent punishment, retaliation, and so forth. Yet the converse holds true." Several theoretical explanations have been

Based on this theoretical evidence, we show the success that matching the crisis type to the post-crisis communication strategy has in limiting the damage to the company. We do so by considering the effect that a confession strategy has on decreasing anger, while also enhancing the sympathy associated with a preventable crisis. Anger and sympathy therefore act as stimuli for subsequent consumer actions related to the company. Emotions are therefore key mediators in the relationships between post-crisis communication strategies and consumer reactions. Although McDonald et al. (2010) provide preliminary evidence on different strategies' impact on these two specific emotions, their mediating effects in the relationships between post-crisis communication strategies and consumer reactions have not as yet been tested. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: The effect of post-crisis communication strategies on consumer reactions is mediated by anger toward the company in a time of crisis;

H1a: The greater the consistency between the post-crisis communication strategy and the type of crisis, the less the felt anger.

H1b: The less the felt anger, (a) the better the attitude to a company, (b) the greater the consumers' intention to buy company's products, and (c) the less the intention to engage in negative word of mouth communication.

H2: The effect of post-crisis communication strategies on consumer reactions is mediated by sympathy for the company in a time of crisis;

H2a: The greater the consistency between the post-crisis communication strategy and the type of crisis, the higher the felt sympathy.

H2b: The higher the felt sympathy, (a) the better the attitude to a company, (b) the greater the consumers' intention to buy company's products, and (c) the less the intention to engage in negative word of mouth communication.

Anger, Sympathy, and the Role of Corporate Reputation

offered for confession being an effective strategy, but till now there is insufficient empirical evidence to definitively accept any of these. For a review, see Weiner (2010).

Within the theoretical framework illustrated above, we also examine the role of another variable that can affect consumer reactions – corporate reputation. Coombs (2007) states that the more positive a company reputation is, the less likely stakeholders are to report negative behavioral reactions in time of crisis. However, despite its central role, the specific effects of reputation have to date hardly been empirically tested. In this research, we adopted the Customer-Based Reputation (CBR) concept (Walsh & Beatty, 2007; Walsh, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009), defined as the overall evaluation of the company on the basis of consumers' reactions to its goods, services, communication activities, and relational skills[3].

As supposed by Coombs (2007) and supported by Walsh and Beatty (2007) and Walsh et al. (2009), CBR has demonstrated its effect on consumers' behavioral reactions. Thus, we examined its role in our conceptual framework and hypothesized its moderating effect on the link between post-crisis communication strategy and the two emotions of anger and sympathy, and – through these emotions – on consumer reactions. In other words, the effect of post-crisis communication strategies is hypothesized to occur as follows: first, post-crisis communication strategies are predicted to affect felt emotions, depending on the consumer perception of the company reputation (CBR); the felt emotions then influence consumer responses (i.e., their attitudes to the company, their intention to buy, their negative word of mouth). See Figure 1. The literature has called the pattern of such predicted effects "moderated mediation" (Hayes, 2013). Hence, we hypothesize:

H3: CBR interacts with post-crisis communication strategies to influence the felt anger, which, in turn, will influence (a) consumer attitudes to a company, (b) their intention to buy company's products, and (c) their intention to engage in negative word of mouth communication. The lower the CBR, the greater the consumers' felt anger.

[3] In this study, we explicitly consider consumers' personal experiences with a company, and not other stakeholders' point of view. Given the focus of our research on consumers, we consider it inappropriate to use a conceptualization of corporate reputation in which various stakeholders evaluate the company and thus we only take consumers and their perceptions of a company into account (Walsh & Beatty, 2007; Walsh, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009).

H4: CBR interacts with post-crisis communication strategies to influence the felt sympathy that, in turn, will influence (a) consumer attitudes to the company, (b) their intention to buy company's products, and (c) their intention to engage in negative word of mouth communication. The higher the CBR, the greater the consumers' felt sympathy.

--Figure 1 about here--

Overview of the Studies and the Empirical Context

We tested our hypotheses by using two mutually exclusive controlled experiments administered in the field with adult consumers. Study 1 examines the mechanisms behind the efficacy of matching post-crisis response strategies to the crisis types on consumer reactions by analyzing anger and sympathy's mediating role on the relationship between post-crisis communication strategy and three different consumer responses: their attitudes to a company, their intentions to buy, and their negative word of mouth communication. Study 2 aims to establish the boundary conditions of the mediating mechanisms displayed in Study 1, by showing how CBR moderates the post-crisis communication strategies' effect on consumers' emotions and thus, indirectly, through mediation on the same consumer responses. In both studies, we analyzed the impact of specific post-crisis communication strategies on consumer reactions in an actual case of preventable crisis – the Costa Concordia shipwreck.

The Costa Concordia was shipwrecked off the Italian coast on January 13, 2012. The ship had 4,229 people on board (3,216 passengers and 1,013 crew members) from 62 countries. In front of the Isola del Giglio, in the Tyrrhenian Sea, the cruise ship hit a rock that tore open a gap of about 70 meters on her left side. The accident resulted in 30 deaths and two missing persons. This shipwreck also caused huge economic damage, not only to Costa Cruises, but to the entire cruise industry (Mayerowitz, 2012).

In the first period after the tragedy, Costa Cruises chose to communicate with the public primarily through the company's web site and social media. The number of Costa Cruises reports was very limited at first. For example, the first message appeared on the official Costa Cruises website about three hours after the accident, followed by another five releases between January 14 and 16. All these messages described the situation and reported information concisely and formally, and were

structured along the lines of press releases. During this period of great uncertainty in terms of Costa Cruises' post-crisis communication strategy, we collected data for the two studies. This allowed us to successfully manipulate different communication strategies, as Costa Cruises had not yet emerged with a clear strategy. The two data collections were completed within two weeks of the shipwreck.

The experimental design of both studies comprised: 1) internal locus - the crisis cause is within the company and this is an intrinsic feature of the real case adopted here; 2) cause controllability - the responsibility for the event is mainly attributed to the company and under its control. In the questionnaire, a specific measure of responsibility controlled the latter feature in order to determine whether the respondents blamed the company and if so, to what extent. Consequently, it is possible to verify that the studies did comprise a case of preventable crisis. Subsequently, the manipulation of post-crisis communication strategies allowed us to examine their effectiveness with regard to this specific crisis type.

Each experimental scenario was built with information that the major newspapers and the media actually reported in the days following the event. All the information selected for the scenarios was rational and unemotional. Only the experimental manipulation of the post-crisis communication strategies was based on fictitious information. (For details, see the paragraphs on the stimulus materials of Study 1 and Study 2).

Study 1: The Mediating Role of Anger and Sympathy

Research design.

Four between-subjects conditions (three manipulations and one comparison group) were created for different post-crisis communication strategies in order to have different versions of the questionnaire. All the analyzed variables were measured variables and the mediators were mean centered. We followed the procedures for multicategorical mediation analysis by means of SPSS that Hayes and Preacher (2012) proposed to investigate treatment effects[4]. In this multicategorical

[4] Given the number of respondents in each analyzed group (on average about 50 respondents per cell) the regression-based Hayes and Preacher's (2012) approach satisfies the prerequisites of accuracy and reliability.

analysis, the omnibus test of the direct effect of the independent variable (*X*) was undertaken to ascertain whether the inclusion of the k – 1 (i.e., 4 – 1) variables coding group to a model of the dependent variable (*Y)* containing proposed mediators improves the fit of the model. The omnibus tests for the indirect effects through mediators produced bootstrap confidence intervals that ascertained the indirect effects of *X* on *Y* through each analyzed mediator. The variables in our design can be summarized as follows:

1) A categorical variable (*X*) indicating exposure to one of the experimental conditions. The manipulated post-crisis communication strategies were coded as follows: DS (denial strategy), ES (excuses strategy), CS (confession strategy), and NCS (no-comment strategy; this group was used as a comparison condition);
2) two continuous mediating variables (*M1* and *M2*) consisting of multiple items for each of the two emotions hypothesized as mediators: anger and sympathy;
3) three continuous outcome variables (*Y1*, *Y2*, and *Y3*) referring to consumer attitudes to the company, their intention to buy the company's products, and negative word of mouth communication.

Stimulus materials.

Narrative versions of the experimental and control conditions were developed, pretested, and then revised after pretesting. Each stimulus narrative began with the same description of the event (i.e., the shipwreck of the Costa Concordia). After the event description, the company's communication strategy (i.e., the experimental manipulation) was given in four different versions of the questionnaire, one for each strategy (the no-comment, denial, excuse, and confession strategies)[5]. (The full versions

Moreover, the bootstrapping procedure, which does not presume multivariate normality, is appropriate in these cases.

[5] A pretest was conducted to verify if each post-crisis communication strategy detailed in the scenarios belongs to the correct category (denial to the denial strategy scenario, diminish to the excuses strategy scenario, rebuild to the confession strategy scenario). Each of the 81 pretest respondents (i.e., Italian students enrolled in different undergraduate and graduate courses; 51.9% female, 48.1% male; all between 19 and 28 years of age)

of each narrative stimulus are available upon request from the authors.) We used the NCS condition (no-comment strategy) as the comparison group, as this company strategy provides no information about the crisis event, and can therefore be used as a benchmark for all the other post-crisis communication strategies examined here.

Respondents and procedure.

The study was conducted at the end of January 2012, during the two weeks following the crisis event. The respondents were approached as they shopped in four city-center shopping areas in Italy by four different interviewers, and randomly assigned to one of the experimental groups. The interviewers personally distributed the questionnaires to the population of interest, which the authors defined as individuals between 18 and 70 years of age. They approached 292 individuals and disqualified 42 due to age issues. Of the remaining 250 individuals approached and screened, about 90% agreed to participate in the survey, of whom 5.3% were disqualified for wrongly selecting the post-crisis communication strategy that the company implemented in the manipulation check (the final sample size comprised 213 Italian consumers). Each participant responded to only one of the versions of the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, which took approximately 15 minutes, the respondents were debriefed and thanked.

The sample can be characterized as follows: 102 men (47.9%) (cf. census percentage according to Statistics Italy for 2012: 49% [www.istat.it]), 22.5% (cf. 18.5% census) were between 18 and 29 years old, 46.4% (cf. 43.9% census) between 30 and 49 years old, 31.1% (cf. 37.6% census) between 50 and 70 years old. Undergraduates or respondents with higher education accounted for 23.2% (cf. 15.7%

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evaluated the degree to which the post-crisis communication strategy detailed in the scenario to which he/she was exposed (only one scenario per respondent) belonged to three specific categories: (1) deny any responsibility for the crisis event (denial), (2) provide elements that decrease the company's responsibility (diminish), (3) take full charge of the crisis and undertake actions aimed at remedying it (rebuild). The ANOVAs showed that the respondents perceived the three post-crisis communication strategies differently: (denial: $F(2, 78) = 107.56$, $p<.01$; excuses: $F(2, 78) = 10.26$, $p<.01$; confession: $F(2, 78) = 22.87$, $p<.01$), while post-hoc tests showed that each of the strategies was mainly evaluated as belonging to the correct category.

census) of the sample, followed by respondents with a high school education (52.8%) (cf. 41.1% census) or less (24%) (cf. 43.2 % census). This level of education is somewhat higher than the average for the Italian population; however, preliminary analysis revealed no confounding effects of this socio-demographic characteristic.

We also checked for three variables which measured, on a seven-point scale: (1) the degree of knowledge that the respondents claimed to have of Costa Cruises (M = 2.90, SD = 1.67), (2) their degree of knowledge of the specific crisis event that involved Costa Cruises (M = 4.25, SD = 1.43), and (3) the extent to which the respondents felt involved and touched by the specific crisis event (M = 4.13, SD = 1. 74). ANOVAs on these variables revealed no differentiation between the experimental groups – the consumers' knowledge of Costa Cruises: F (3, 210) = 1.45, p = .23; the consumers' knowledge of the specific crisis event: F (3, 210) = 2.29, p = .07; the consumers' crisis involvement: F (3, 210) = .49, p = .69). It should be noted that the level of the respondents' involvement in the crisis event is higher than the mean value of the scale (t = 5.07, p < .00). This high level of involvement, together with our scenarios characteristics, defines this crisis as a typical case in which the match between the crisis type and the crisis response strategy improves the post-crisis attitude to the company (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012).

At the same time, we also checked for any direct experience that the respondents might have had with Costa Cruises: 77.5% had no direct experience with the Costa Cruises and only 16.9% of the sample had bought a cruise from Costa Cruises (23.5% of the sample had bought a cruise from a competitor).

Finally, we checked for the consumer-company identification (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000) and for the consumer-overall company evaluation in order to ensure there were no effects from the different previous evaluations of these variables. At the beginning of the questionnaire (before the manipulation), we asked respondents to rate their identification and overall evaluation on a seven-point scale. The ANOVA on consumer-company identification (M = 1.84, SD = 1.11) showed no differences among groups (F (3, 210) = 1.16, p = .33). The ANOVA on overall evaluation item, that

ranged from -3 to +3, (M = -0.14, SD =2.69) revealed no differentiation between the groups (F (3, 210) = 2.34, p = .053).

Measures.

Mediating variables. Anger and sympathy were measured with two seven-point items each anchored by "very weak" and "very strong." Answers were given in response to the query, ''Based on the information you read at the beginning, would you please express the degree to which you felt each of the following emotions?" We measure anger with "annoyed" and "angry" (adapted from *Authors*, 2013) and sympathy with "sympathetic" and "compassionate" (adapted by Niezink et al., 2012). A factor analysis on the total sample showed that the proposed emotion items loaded on two different factors. Anger items loaded on one factor (both factor loadings were .94), where the observed inter-correlation of items was .80; sympathy items loaded on a different factor (the factor loadings were .86 and .88) where the observed inter-correlation of items was .73.

Outcome variables. The three outcomes variables were measured by three seven-point items each. The consumer attitude to the company was measured with the following items, given in response to the query, "Based on the information you read at the beginning, would you please express how you evaluate the company?": bad-good, unfavorable-favorable, negative-positive, (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2001). A factor analysis verified that the items loaded on one factor, ranging from .96 to .97. Cronbach alpha was .96. The intention to buy was measured on a seven-point disagreement/agreement scale, with "It's very likely that I will buy this company's products," "I will purchase this company's products the next time I need a product," and "I will definitely try this company's products" (adapted from Grewal, Monroe, & Krishnan, 1998). All three items loaded on one factor, ranging from .94 to .97. Cronbach alpha was .95. Negative word of mouth communication was measured on a seven-point disagreement/agreement scale with the following items: "I intend to say negative things about this company to friends, relatives, and other people," "I intend not to recommend purchase of this company's products to friends, relatives, and other people," and "I intend to mention unfavorable things about the company to my friends, relatives, and other people", (adapted from Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003). The three items loaded on one factor, ranging from .70 to .92. Cronbach alpha was .78.

Manipulation checks.

First of all, we checked how the respondents rated the crisis responsibility, regardless of the experimental group they had been randomly assigned to. With this check, we verified the controllable cause of the company crisis as the respondents perceived this, which should be similar in all the experimental groups. Respondents rated the crisis responsibility on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (cause not controllable by the company) to 7 (cause controllable by the company), attributing the cause of the crisis mainly to the company (M = 5.58, SD = 1.48)[6]. It should be noted that this value is higher than the mean value of the scale (t = 19.86, p < .00). Given the characteristics of internal locus and controllable cause of the crisis by the company, the case investigated in this study was – as expected – confirmed as belonging to the preventable crises category. The manipulation was verified in the final section of the questionnaire, where we asked respondents to select the post-crisis communication strategy that the company had applied. We retained only the questionnaires in which the participants remembered the post-crisis communication strategy correctly in each experimental condition.

Analytical Procedures.

We use the Hayes and Preacher (2012) procedure for the multicategorical mediation analysis. Before testing our hypotheses, we assessed the convergent and discriminant validity of our measures. Using structural equation modeling (Lisrel 8.80), we ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on mediators and dependent variables, (i.e., anger, sympathy, attitudes to the company, intentions to buy, and negative word of mouth communication). The fit of the model was good (χ^2 (df) = 111.99 (55); CFI = .99; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .05). All the reliability statistics were above .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and the average variances extracted were above the recommended threshold of .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Given the satisfactory model fit and high factor loadings of each item on its corresponding dimension, it is appropriate to move to tests of hypotheses. Table 1 shows the descriptives (means and standard deviations) for all variables for the four groups.

[6] An ANOVA did not find differences between the experimental groups (F (3, 209) = .99; p = .40).

--Table 1 about here--

Results.

The omnibus tests show that the effect of the communication strategy is not statistically significant regarding the attitude to the company analysis (F (3, 207) = 2.00, p = .12), pointing out that anger and sympathy fully mediate the effects of the manipulation on this outcome, whereas it is significant regarding the word of mouth communication (F (3, 207) = 2.64, p = .05) and intention to buy (F (3, 207) = 2.72, p = .05) analyses (see Table 2).

The top panel of Table 2 shows the mediators model, highlighting that the manipulation has significant effects on anger and sympathy for CS. In detail, the CS condition favors .90 units less the feelings of anger than does the no-comment strategy condition (p = .02), whereas the ES and the DS do not influence the feelings of anger compared to the control condition, thus supporting H1a. The CS condition favors .76 units more the feelings of sympathy, than does the no-comment strategy condition (p < .01), whereas the ES and DS conditions do not influence the feelings of sympathy compared to the control condition, thus supporting H2a.

Examining the output models, anger (b = -.19, p < .01) and sympathy (b = .51, p < .01) have significant effects on the attitude to the company. Table 2 indicates that significant relative direct effect of the manipulation on attitude occurs for CS, but not for DS and ES. Omnibus inferences for the indirect effects of the manipulation on the attitudes focus on the question whether all relative indirect effects are equal to zero. The indirect effects through anger (effect = -.01, bootstrapping confidence interval (C.I.) = -.02, -.01) and the indirect effects through sympathy (effect = .04, bootstrapping C.I. = .01, .10) are statistically significant. By examining each specific indirect effect, we found that, relative to the control condition, those assigned to the CS condition have an attitude that is .17 units higher due to the confession strategy's decreasing effect on anger, which in turn affects attitude (bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect: .03, .38), thus supporting H1b. In a similar vein, they have an attitude that is .39 units higher due to the confession strategy's increasing effect on sympathy, which in turn affects this outcome positively (bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect: .15, .68), thus supporting H2b.

With regard to the intention to buy, anger (b = -.14, p = .02) and sympathy (b = .67, p < .01) also have significant effects on this outcome. Table 2 highlights that there is a significant, relative direct effect of the manipulation on the intention to buy with regard to CS (p = .05), but not the DS and ES. Omnibus inferences about the indirect effects of the manipulation on the intention to buy show that the indirect effects through anger (effect = -.01, bootstrapping C.I. = -.02, -.01) and the indirect effects through sympathy (effect = .06, bootstrapping C.I. = .02, .13) are statistically significant. Focusing on each indirect effect, we found that, relative to the control condition, those assigned to the CS condition have an intention to buy that is .12 units higher due to the confession strategy's decreasing effect on anger, which in turn affects the outcome (bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect: .01, .33), thus supporting H1b. At the same time, those assigned to the CS condition's intention to buy is .51 units higher due to the confession strategy's increasing effect on sympathy, which in turn affects this outcome positively (bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect: .21, .84), thus supporting H2b.

Anger (b = .14, p < .01) and sympathy (b = -.29, p < .01) also demonstrate significant effects on negative word of mouth communication. Table 2 shows that there is a significant, relative direct effect of the manipulation on negative word of mouth communication with regard to the CS, but not the DS and ES. Omnibus inferences about the indirect effects through anger (effect = .01, bootstrapping C.I. = .01, .02) and through sympathy (effect = -.03, bootstrapping C.I. = -.07, -.01) are statistically significant. By examining each specific indirect effect it can be noted that, relative to the control condition, those assigned to the CS condition have an intention to spread negative words against the company that is .13 units lower due to the confession strategy's decreasing effect on anger (bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect: -.30, -.02), thus supporting H1b. Those assigned to CS also show an intention to spread negative words that is .22 units lower due to the confession strategy's increasing effect on sympathy (bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect: -.42, -.07), thus supporting H2b.

Study 1, therefore, produced evidence that a match between the crisis type (in this case, the preventable crisis) and the post-crisis communication strategy (in this case, the confession strategy)

has a positive effect on limiting the damage for the company, thus shedding direct light on the mediating mechanisms of anger and sympathy, which underlie this effect.

--Table 2 about here--

Study 2: The Moderating Role of CBR

The objective of Study 2 was to analyze the moderating role that CBR plays in the mediational process linking consumer evaluations of corporate communication strategies in a time of crisis, consumer emotions, and consumer reactions. We tested this moderating role on the link between post-crisis communication strategy and the two emotions of anger and sympathy.

Research Design.

In this study, we consider the two opposing communication strategies of denial and confession. These strategies were found to elicit the most differing consumer reactions: denial eliciting the most negative and confession the most positive reactions. Weiner et al. (1991) present a similar comparison between these two strategies.

We created between-subjects manipulations to produce two versions of the questionnaire: one for the denial communication strategy, and one for the confession communication strategy. All the analyzed variables were measured variables; the moderator and mediators were mean centered. To examine the conditional indirect effects, we used the SPSS procedure to compute the conditional indirect effects as described by Hayes (2013). In this analysis, the direct effect of the independent variable *(X)* on the dependent variable *(Y)* quantifies how much two cases differing by one unit on the *X* are estimated to differ on the *Y*, independent of the effect of the mediators on *Y*. This analysis also provides the conditional indirect effects, which provide insights into the contingent nature of *X*'s effect on *Y* through the mediators, depending on the moderator.

The variables are summarized as follows:

1) a dichotomous manipulated post-crisis communication strategy variable (*X*) indicating exposure to either one of the two experimental conditions. The experimental condition indicating the company's denial communication strategy is coded -1, whereas that indicating the confession communication strategy is coded +1;
2) a continuous moderator variable (*W*) referring to CBR;

3) two continuous mediating variables (*M1* and *M2*) consisting of multiple items for each of the two emotions: anger and sympathy;
4) three continuous outcome variables (*Y1*, *Y2*, and *Y3*) referring to consumer attitudes to the company, their intentions to buy the company's products, and word of mouth communication.

Stimulus materials.

Both stimulus narratives used the same event description used in Study 1. After the event description, the company's communication strategy was given in two different versions of the questionnaire, one for each strategy (i.e., denial and confession strategies). (The full versions of each narrative stimulus are available upon request from the authors.)

Respondents and procedure.

The study was conducted at the end of January 2012. The respondents were approached as they shopped in three Italian city-center shopping areas, and randomly assigned to one of the experimental groups. We followed the same procedure used in Study 1 and the same population of interest (individuals between 18 and 70 years of age). Interviewers approached 159 individuals and disqualified 24 due to age issues. Of the remaining 135 individuals approached and screened, 88.2% agreed to participate in the survey, of whom 6.7% were disqualified for wrongly selecting the post-crisis communication strategy that the company implemented in the manipulation check. The final sample size comprised 111 Italian consumers (58 in the denial strategy group, 53 in the confession strategy group). Each participant responded to only one of versions of the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, which took approximately 15 minutes, the respondents were debriefed and thanked.

The sample can be characterized as follows: 48 men (43.2%), 26.7% were between 18 and 29 years old, 40.1% between 30 and 49 years old, 33.2% between 50 and 70 years old. Undergraduates or respondents with higher education accounted for 27.1% of the sample, followed by respondents with a high school education (40.5%) or less (32.4%). Again the level of education was higher than the average for the Italian population; however, analyses revealed no confounding effects of education.

We also checked, on a seven-point scale, for the same variables illustrated in Study 1: the degree of knowledge that respondents claimed to have of Costa Cruises (M = 3.00, SD = 1.76), their degree of knowledge of the specific crisis event that involved Costa Cruises (M = 4.57, SD = 1.44), and the extent to which the respondents felt involved and touched by the crisis event (M = 4.16, SD = 1. 86). These variables revealed no differentiation between the two groups: (the consumers' knowledge of Costa Cruises: t = .00, p = 1.00; the consumers' knowledge of the specific crisis event: t = .65, p = .52; the consumers' crisis involvement: t = 1.28, p = .21). Also in this case, the level of the respondents' involvement in the crisis event is higher than the mean value of the scale (t = 3.75, p < .00).

As regard any direct experience with the company, 72.1% of the sample had no direct experience with Costa Cruises, and only 24.3% of respondents bought a cruise from Costa Cruises (16.2% had bought a cruise from a competitor). The results confirmed also there were no effects from previous company evaluation, that ranged from -3 to +3, (M = .18, SD = 1.97; t = 1.12, p = .27) and from consumer-company identification (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000) (M = 1.53, SD = 1.46; t = 1.76, p =.16), both measured before the manipulation.

Measures.

Moderator variable. CBR is composed of 15 items (Walsh et al., 2009). Responses were recorded on a seven-point scale anchored by "not at all" and "very much" and given in response to the query, "Would you please express how much you agree with the following statements?" A sample item of the scale is "Costa Cruises is a strong, reliable company." A factor analysis demonstrated that all the items loaded on one factor with loadings ranging from .66 to .95. Cronbach alpha was .91.

Mediating variables. Anger and sympathy were measured using the same items employed in Study 1. A factor analysis on the total sample showed that the proposed emotion items adequately loaded on two different factors[7].

[7] Anger items loaded on one factor (factor loadings were .93 and .94) with the inter-correlation between the items.81; sympathy items loaded on a different factor (factor loadings were .90 and .91) with the inter-correlation between items .71.

Outcome variables. Consumer attitudes to the company, their intentions to buy, and word of mouth communication were measured by the same items used in Study 1. A factor analysis verified that the proposed items adequately loaded on three different factors[8].

Manipulation checks.

Firstly, respondents were asked to assess the responsibility for the crisis on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (cause not controllable by the company) to 7 (cause controllable by the company). In this study too, they rated the crisis responsibility as mainly attributable to the company (M = 6.32, SD = .95)[9] with a value higher than the mean value of the scale (t = 31.47, p < .00). This result confirms that, as in Study 1, the respondents in both experimental groups believe the investigated case belongs to the preventable crises category. The manipulation was verified in the final section of the questionnaire, where we asked respondents to select the post-crisis communication strategy that the company had applied (denial or confession). We retained only the questionnaires in which the participants remembered the post-crisis communication strategy correctly in each experimental condition.

Results.

Table 3 presents the results of the manipulation. The top panel presents the results for attitudes to the company, the central panel shows the results for intentions to buy as the outcome variable, and finally the bottom panel presents the results for word of mouth communication.

Under the mediator variable models, we find that the experimental treatment and CBR interact significantly to influence sympathy (.20, t = 2.21, p < .05), but not anger (-.11, t = -.73, p > .05). Under the outcome variable models, we find that anger and sympathy have a significant effect on attitudes to the company (anger: -.17, t = -2.77, p < .01; sympathy: .69, t = 7.81, p < .001), on their

[8] Attitudes to the company items loaded on one factor, ranging from .86 to .94, with a Cronbach alpha of .96; intentions to buy items loaded on a second factor, ranging from .86 to .92, with a Cronbach alpha of .95; and word of mouth items loaded on a third factor, ranging from .84 to .92, with a Cronbach alpha of .89.

[9] A t-test did not find difference between the experimental groups (t (109) = -1.37; p = .17)

intentions to buy (anger: -.15, t = -1.96, p < .05; sympathy: .69, t = 5.90, p < .001), and negative word of mouth communication (anger: .24, t = 2.88, p < .01; sympathy: -.37, t = -3.12, p < .01).

Given the significant interaction between the manipulation and CBR on sympathy, it made sense to probe the indirect effect by estimating, for each of the three outcomes, the conditional indirect effects at values of the moderator (see Table 3). As can be seen, all the conditional indirect effects are significantly different from zero at α = .05 in the cases of attitudes, intention to buy, and word of mouth outcomes, given the absence of zero in each bootstrap interval. Therefore, the results confirm that, for all three outcome variables analyzed, the indirect effect of the experimental treatment via sympathy is stronger when CBR is high rather than low, thus supporting H4.

Conversely, the indirect effect of the experimental treatment via anger is not affected by CBR. Therefore, H3 is not supported. The greater the inconsistency between the company's post-crisis communication strategy and the type of crisis, the greater the anger the consumers felt, which, in turn, will increase their negative reactions; and this mediating mechanism is not influenced by CBR. Thus, despite the literature demonstrating that CBR can affect consumers' reactions (Coombs 2007; Walsh and Beatty, 2007; Walsh et al., 2009), our hypothesized path of influence on the specific consumer emotional reaction of anger is not supported. In line with recent research on how confession works (Weiner, 2010), a possible explanation for this result is that the confession strategy automatically activates a reduction in anger, without the company reputation having additional influences. Study 2 thus extended Study 1 by showing the moderating role played by CBR in sympathy's mediational process, but not in that of anger.

--Table 3 about here—

Discussion

These studies investigate in an actual case of crisis – the Costa Concordia shipwreck off the Italian coast on January 13, 2012 –, the mechanisms that underlie the efficacy of matching the post-crisis communication strategies to the crisis types on key consumer psychological and behavioral outcomes. Study 1, which compared the different post-crisis communication strategies in detail, provides evidence that matching the strategy of confession to a preventable crisis case has positive emotional repercussions in terms of reducing anger and increasing sympathy. These results extend available

research (e.g., Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012) that identifies specific conditions for a successful match or mismatch between post-crisis communication strategies and crisis types, but fails to provide explanations for these positive effects. Specifically, the results of our study show the important effects that post-crisis communication strategies have on correcting consumers' emotional reactions toward a company as elicited by their evaluations of the crisis responsibility and, consequently, on consumers' attitudinal and behavioral reactions toward this company.

Additionally, Study 2 shows that the positive effect of sympathy, but not that of anger, is moderated by consumers' perception of corporate reputation. Specifically, consumers with a better perception of corporate reputation respond with a higher level of sympathy to a company confession and, consequently, have more positive post-crisis reactions toward the company. Conversely, reputation does not affect consumers' anger following a company confession. The reason for this difference could be that a high level of perceived company reputation allows consumers to understand the company's current problems, which in turn drives their feelings of sympathy (Niezink et al., 2012; Lishner et al., 2011). Conversely, the confession strategy could more automatically activate a reduction in anger, as illustrated by Weiner (2010) in his review of the reasons why confession works.

Managerial Implications

Our research offers interesting implications for managers and practitioners by suggesting that crisis management is a complex phenomenon; it should not only be considered from a purely rational point of view, but also from an emotional perspective. This allows practitioners to gain a more complete overview of a crisis event, which they will then be able to manage in a more integrated way and with greater success. In other words, crisis events should be approached by carefully considering consumers' emotional reactions.

Our results demonstrate the central role of the two emotions of anger and sympathy; crisis managers should therefore be aware that anger could amplify negative consumer reactions in times of crisis, while sympathy has the capacity to decrease them. In particular, practitioners need to know which post-crisis communication strategies are most effective in decreasing feelings of anger and increasing feelings of sympathy. Our findings confirm the importance of adopting a communication strategy that is consistent with the crisis type being confronted. We find that the best strategy to

prevent anger and evoke sympathy in the preventable crisis type – the one investigated in this research – is *confession*, which belongs to the rebuild post-crisis communication strategies group.

Our results also highlight that the mediating role of sympathy depends on consumers' perception of CBR, while anger appears to have a mediating role that corporate reputation cannot moderate. Feelings of anger associated with responsibility attribution for a crisis event lead to negative consumer reactions; the greater the inconsistency between the company's post-crisis communication strategy and the type of crisis in question, the more the felt anger will increase the negative consumer reactions, which CBR cannot affect. Conversely, company reputation has proved to favor feelings of sympathy. The higher the CBR, the greater the consumers' felt sympathy. Thus, crisis managers can take advantage of a positive corporate reputation to enhance sympathy, which, in turn, has been shown to limit negative consumer reactions.

All this indicates that crisis managers can use CBR to enhance feelings of sympathy's positive effect, but that this will fail to limit the felt anger. Moreover, CBR can be used to its full potential to elicit feelings of sympathy if a company adopts a post-crisis communication strategy consistent with the crisis type addressed.

Limitations and further research

Our study has several limitations and provides a number of opportunities for future research. First, it could be of great interest to compare different specific rebuild communication strategies (e.g., compensation, apology) focused on preventable crisis in future studies, in order to further investigate the effectiveness of different communication options within the general category of the rebuild post-crisis communication strategy investigated here. Secondly, we analyzed a case of a rather unusual and infrequent crisis. Applying the model presented in this study to more common preventable crisis cases – like those affecting frequently purchased good product types – is a reasonable extension. This will allow researchers to examine whether the mediating role of emotions and the moderating role of CBR presented here show the same intensity in different consumption contexts within the same crisis type, (i.e., preventable type). Similarly, applying our model to different crisis types, (i.e., a victim or an accidental crisis types) could ascertain how the mediating role of anger and sympathy works, depending on the type of post-crisis communication strategy used.

Second, our empirical research was based on an actual crisis case. If, on the one hand, this strengthens our results by anchoring them to reality, on the other they may be affected by biases and influences related to actual events. Additional studies should verify the reliability of the results in other actual crisis events in order to further strengthen these findings. Furthermore, although our study is based on a real crisis case, the characteristic of static format of the scenarios we used may not fully reflect the dynamic processes functioning during an actual crisis. Our data collection was undertaken within the first two weeks following the crisis event in order to ensure the most reliable results, as the company did not adopt a clear post-crisis communication strategy during that time. Thus, this did not affect our manipulation of post-crisis communication strategies or, consequently, our results. It would, however, be very interesting to study the evolution of consumer reactions in a time of crisis, as a company may change its post-crisis communication strategies over time. A longitudinal analysis of consumers' reactions could therefore contribute to research in this area and could lead to interesting results.

Third, future studies should address the shortcomings associated with the use of measures of consumer attitudes and intentions. We recognize that reliance on self-reported measures may limit the conclusions drawn from our findings, and this issue deserves investigation in future studies. Finally, our model might also be extended to study the spillover effects of a crisis for the umbrella brand in other categories, or for the other brands that are present in the same industry in which the crisis event occurred.

In conclusion, our research is one of the first attempts to conduct an integrated and comprehensive investigation of the impact of post-crisis communication strategies on consumer reactions. We found empirical support for our theoretical arguments, nevertheless we call for more research aimed at deepening the psychological mechanisms behind consumer responses in times of crisis.

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Figure 1

CBR moderation of the effects of post-crisis communication strategies on emotions, plus the effects of emotions on consumer reactions

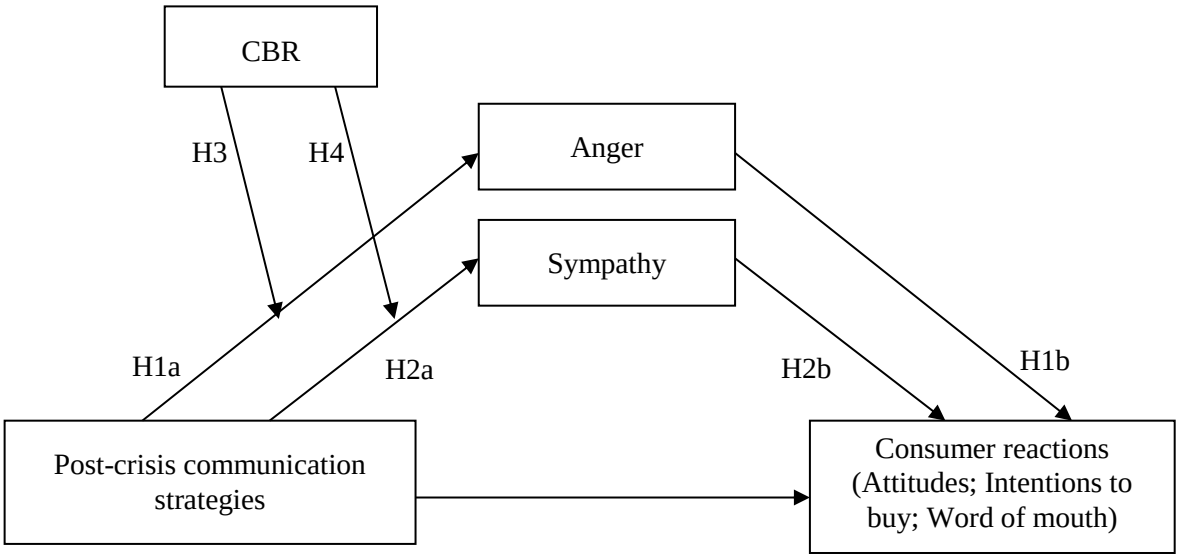

Table 1

Descriptive statistics

	NCS (N = 53)		DS (N = 54)		ES (N = 53)		CS (N = 53)	
Constructs	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
Anger	4.77	1.73	4.44	1.84	4.31	2.07	3.88	2.00
Sympathy	1.64	.86	1.66	.90	1.58	.88	2.40	1.35
Attitudes toward the company	2.54	1.24	2.67	1.34	2.76	1.58	3.66	1.55
Intentions to buy	3.08	1.87	2.87	1.67	3.00	1.71	4.30	1.76
Negative word of mouth communication	3.17	1.26	3.19	1.40	2.79	1.41	2.31	1.09

Table 2

Results of multicategorical mediation tests using bootstrapping bias-corrected procedure

Mediator model: anger and sympathy				
	Unstd. Estimates	SE	t	p-value
Effects of manipulation on anger (a_i)				
DS (manipulation on anger in group denial strategy)	-.34	.37	-.91	.36
ES (manipulation on anger in group excuses strategy)	-.46	.37	-1.24	.22
CS (manipulation on anger in group confession strategy)	-.90	.37	-2.40	.02
Effects of manipulation on sympathy (a_i)				
DS (manipulation on sympathy in group denial strategy)	.02	.21	.08	.94
ES (manipulation on sympathy in group excuses strategy)	-.07	.21	-.32	.75
CS (manipulation on sympathy in group confession strategy)	.76	.21	3.62	.00

Outcome model: Attitude toward the company				
	Unstd. Estimates	SE	t	p-value
Effect of anger on attitude (b)	-.19	.05	-3.94	.00
Effect of sympathy on attitude (b)	.51	.09	5.74	.00
Relative direct effects (c_i')				
DS (manipulation on attitude in group denial strategy)	.06	.24	.25	.80
ES (manipulation on attitude in group excuses strategy)	.17	.24	.71	.48
CS (manipulation on attitude in group confession strategy)	.57	.25	2.25	.03
Omnibus test of direct effect	$F(3, 207) = 2.00$, $p = .12$			
				R-square = .35
	Effect	SE (boot)	LLCI	ULCI
Relative indirect Effects (a_ib)				
Through anger				
DS (manipulation on attitude in group denial strategy)	.06	.07	-.06	.22
ES (manipulation on attitude in group excuses strategy)	.07	.18	-.04	.26
CS (manipulation on attitude in group confession strategy)	.17	.09	.03	.38
OMNIBUS TEST	-.01	.01	-.02	-.01
Through sympathy				
DS (manipulation on attitude in group denial strategy)	.01	.09	-.17	.18
ES (manipulation on attitude in group excuses strategy)	-.03	.09	-.21	.14
CS (manipulation on attitude in group confession strategy)	.39	.13	.15	.68
OMNIBUS TEST	.04	.02	.01	.10

Outcome model: Intention to buy				
	Unstd. Estimates	SE	t	p-value
Effect of anger on intention to buy (b)	-.14	.06	-2.32	.02
Effect of sympathy on intention to buy (b)	.67	.11	5.99	.00
Relative direct effects (c_i')				
DS (manipulation on intention to buy in group denial strategy)	-.26	.30	-.86	.39
ES (manipulation on intention to buy in group excuses strategy)	-.09	.31	-.29	.77
CS (manipulation on intention to buy in group confession strategy)	.59	.32	1.96	.05
Omnibus test of direct effect	$F(3, 207) = 2.72$, $p = .05$			
				R-square = .30
	Effect	SE (boot)	LLCI	ULCI
Relative indirect Effects (a_ib)				
Through anger				
DS (manipulation on intention to buy in group denial strategy)	.05	.06	-.05	.19
ES (manipulation on intention to buy in group excuses strategy)	.06	.06	-.03	.22
CS (manipulation on intention to buy in group confession strategy)	.12	.08	.01	.33
OMNIBUS TEST	-.01	.01	-.02	-.01
Through sympathy				
DS (manipulation on intention to buy in group denial strategy)	.01	.11	-.21	.24
ES (manipulation on intention to buy in group excuses strategy)	-.04	.12	-.27	.20

CS (manipulation on intention to buy in group confession strategy)	.51	.16	.21	.84
OMNIBUS TEST	.06	.03	.02	.13

Outcome model: Negative word of mouth communication				
	Unstd. Estimates	SE	t	p-value
Effect of anger on word of mouth (b)	.14	.05	3.10	.00
Effect of sympathy on word of mouth (b)	-.29	.09	-3.33	.00
Relative direct effects (c_i')				
DS (manipulation on word of mouth in group denial strategy)	.07	.24	.32	.75
ES (manipulation on word of mouth in group excuses strategy)	-.33	.24	-1.41	.16
CS (manipulation on word of mouth in group confession strategy)	-.52	.25	-2.09	.04
Omnibus test of direct effect	$F(3, 207) = 2.64$, $p = .05$			
				R-square = .19
	Effect	SE (boot)	LLCI	ULCI
Relative indirect Effects (a_ib)				
Through anger				
DS (manipulation on word of mouth in group denial strategy)	-.05	.06	-.18	.04
ES (manipulation on word of mouth in group excuses strategy)	-.07	.06	-.21	.03
CS (manipulation on word of mouth in group confession strategy)	-.13	.08	-.30	-.02
OMNIBUS TEST	.01	.01	.01	.02
Through sympathy				
DS (manipulation on word of mouth in group denial strategy)	.00	.05	-.11	.10
ES (manipulation on word of mouth in group excuses strategy)	.02	.05	-.09	.12
CS (manipulation on word of mouth in group confession strategy)	-.22	.09	-.42	-.07
OMNIBUS TEST	-.03	.02	-.07	-.01

Table 3

Conditional process model for anger and sympathy as mediators, CBR as moderator, and attitude toward the company, intention to buy, and negative word of mouth communication as outcomes, respectively.

Outcomes: Attitudes toward the company						
	Mediator variable Model: *anger*		Mediator variable Model: *sympathy*		Outcome variable model: *Attitude toward the company*	
	b	t	b	t	b	t
X: manipulation	-.36	-2.06*	.47	4.30***		
W: CBR	-.48	-3.26***	.57	6.27***		
X*W	-.11	-.73	.20	2.21*		
M_1: anger					-.17	-2.77**
M_2: sympathy					.69	7.81***
X: manipulation					-.01	-.04
Conditional indirect effect(s) of X on Y at values of the moderator(s)						
Bootstrap 95% Confidence Intervals for Conditional Indirect Effect - Bias Corrected and Accelerated (BCa)						
	CBR	Effect	Lower		Upper	
Anger	-1.21	.04	.00		.15	
	.00	.06	.01		.18	
	1.21	.09	.01		.27	
Sympathy	-1.21	.15	.00		.34	
	.00	.32	.15		.52	
	1.21	.49	.21		.80	
					R-square = .50	

Outcomes: Intentions to buy						
	Mediator variable Model: *anger*		Mediator variable Model: *sympathy*		Outcome variable model: *Intention to buy*	
	b	t	b	t	b	t
X: manipulation	-.36	-2.06*	.47	4.30***		
W: CBR	-.48	-3.26***	.57	6.27***		
X*W	-.11	-.73	.20	2.21*		
M_1: anger					-.15	-1.96*
M_2: sympathy					.69	5.90***
X: manipulation					-.18	-1.12
Conditional indirect effect(s) of X on Y at values of the moderator(s)						
Bootstrap 95% Confidence Intervals for Conditional Indirect Effect - Bias Corrected and Accelerated (BCa)						
	CBR	Effect	Lower		Upper	
Anger	-1.21	.03	-.02		.20	
	.00	.05	.00		.19	
	1.21	.07	.01		.24	
Sympathy	-1.21	.16	.01		.36	
	.00	.33	.17		.59	
	1.21	.49	.22		.91	
					R-square = .33	

Outcomes: Negative word of mouth communication						
	Mediator variable Model: *anger*		Mediator variable Model: *sympathy*		Outcome variable model: *Negative word of mouth communication*	
	b	t	b	t	b	t
X : manipulation	-.36	-2.06*	.47	4.30***		
W: CBR	-.48	-3.26***	.57	6.27***		
X*W	-.11	-.73	.20	2.21*		

M_1: anger			.24	2.88**
M_2: sympathy			-.37	-3.12**
X: manipulation			.17	1.05
Conditional indirect effect(s) of X on Y at values of the moderator(s)				
Bootstrap 95% Confidence Intervals for Conditional Indirect Effect - Bias Corrected and Accelerated (BCa)				
	CBR	Effect	Lower	Upper
Anger	-1.21	-.06	-.23	.05
	.00	-.09	-.25	-.01
	1.21	-.12	-.34	-.01
Sympathy	-1.21	-.08	-.23	-.01
	.00	-.17	-.36	-.06
	1.21	-.26	-.54	-.07
				R-square = .21

* if p < .05; ** if p < .01; *** if p < .001. W = moderator, M = mediator, X = manipulation.